

International Solidarity in the Distribution of the World's Goods

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« International Solidarity in the Distribution of the World's Goods » *

Canadians traditionally celebrate Labour Day on the first Monday of September when we reflect on the dignity of human work stressing its importance in people's lives. We consider the economic and political aspects of work, as well as its spiritual and moral implications.

For Labour Day this year, we would like to suggest some reflections on a matter of particular importance these days: international solidarity in the distribution of the product of man's labour.

Man's labour was intended by God to place the resources of the entire universe at the service of all men. Until now, unfortunately, it has succeeded in satisfying the needs of only a fraction of mankind. The creator wanted man's labour to foster unity among men, but because its product has been so unjustly divided, men are split into two groups — the « haves » and the « havenots ». Why does such a situation exist, and continue to sow the seeds of division and discord?

The last two encyclicals of the late Pope John XXIII, the preoccupations of the Vatican Council, the appeal of Pope Paul VI from Bombay, the designation of 1965 by the General Assembly of the United Nations as « International Cooperation Year » — all these require us to give serious thought to the grave problem of hunger in the world; and encourage us to discover how we can more effectively provide help to the hungry.

The Situation at Present

To underline the importance of this problem raised by the unsatisfactory distribution of the world's riches, many examples could be cited. These all draw special attention to the needs of a particularly disfavoured group of mankind. For example, in 1965, the deaths of millions of persons can be traced to malnutrition and hunger, directly or indirectly. More than one-half of our fellow men do not eat properly, and this situation seems to be growing steadily worse.

The least developed countries now are estimated to have only 1/40th of the per capita income of the developed countries and may well have only 1/100th in the years ahead, thus widening still further the abyss that divides the privileged and underprivileged. In the 20th Century, one child out of three is born with no chance of living a normal life. Life expectancy is directly related to the degree of economic development in a country.¹

Is it really possible that we have a billion and a half starving people on our consciences and yet do not react more sharply? If the problem itself is frightening, is it not equally terrifying to see the indifference of so many people, and of so many Christians who calmly soothe their consciences while whole nations flounder in misery?

Principles

Some important principles should inspire the efforts of all men of good will in this matter.

* Canadian Bishop's Statement for Labour Day, 1965.

(1) L.-J. Lebreton, « Le Drame du siècle », 1964.

The first is that all men are fundamentally united in one great human family. Whoever we are, regardless of race, language or sex, and regardless of where we were born, we are all brothers, called to the same destiny in this world and in the next. Born of one and the same Father, having the same nature, redeemed by the same Saviour, all men are endowed with the same rights among which is the right to life and to decent living conditions. In this one great family the sufferings of a few members must be the sufferings of all members, and must be alleviated by those who have the means to do so. The economic resources of the world should be administered and distributed to serve the welfare of the whole human family and not the interests of only a few; collective egoism, like individual egoism, must be rooted out.

« God created men as brothers, not enemies. He gave them the earth to be cultivated by their toil and labour. Each and every man is to enjoy the fruits of the earth and to receive from it his sustenance and the necessities of life. »²

The goods of the world, therefore, are destined for the use of all men. Those who own property — individuals as well as countries — must realize that ownership of property involves a duty towards all men. No one has the right to abandon his brother in need; and if, in a given country, a decent minimum share of available resources can be determined for each citizen, a similar standard must exist at the level of the whole human race.

Indeed, distributive justice among nations is founded on this respect for the inalienable rights of the human person and on the fact that the goods of the world are destined for the use of all men. But this can be achieved only through concerted efforts on the part of all nations.

There is a serious obligation in justice to share our goods with those who are hungry. For too long, foreign aid to the less developed countries has been considered an act of kindness or generosity, and not a requirement of justice. Failure to recognize the extent of this obligation is perhaps due to the fact that only recently have men become conscious of the existence of a universal common good. Today, more than ever, it is clear that a country which would refuse to aid the less developed countries, or would do so in a niggardly fashion, and not according to its true capabilities, would sin gravely against international social justice. This obligation becomes all the more urgent in proportion as some nations spend great resources while other nations are caught in the grip of ever-pressing needs.

We often think in terms of giving gifts to the less developed countries when we really should be thinking in terms of trading with these countries.

Most of the countries which today seek our material help are highly civilized, and in the course of centuries they have enriched the cultural and spiritual patrimony of mankind. We have all profited and continue to gain from their civilizations and cultures. These « extra-economic » values are certainly worth the share of our material riches that we consent to part with; indeed, they are worth more.

Faced with this situation of the unjust distribution of riches in the world and the evils it engenders, especially mass hunger, men have no choice but to see that they are one and to work towards effective international co-operation.

(2) John XXIII, « Ad Petri cathedram », June 29, 1959. *The Encyclicals and Other Messages of John XXIII*, TPS Press, Washington, D.C., 1964, p. 29.

Appeal to the Conscience of Men

First of all, we appeal to the conscience of all Christians and of all men of good will. Christ's teaching is clear:

« Let him who has two coats share with him who has none; and let him who has food do likewise. » (Luke 3:11)

Pope John XXIII had this to say in *Mater et Magistra*:

« ... We are equally responsible for the undernourished peoples ... Therefore it is necessary to awaken men's consciences to the sense of their responsibility which weighs upon everyone — especially upon those who are more richly blessed with this world's goods ... »³

The insensitive conscience of the rich is perhaps the greatest evil of our times. It is imperative that no one ignore mankind's present state and its contradictions; each must recognize his responsibility for changing it. This will require a spiritual revolution that will lead us to consider our neighbour as our equal, possessing the same rights as ourselves; a conversion that will free us of our sordid egoism and allow us to become sincerely altruistic; a conversion, in a word, that will fill us with brotherly love which, these days, will express itself in sharing and trading our goods with others.

Let men be on their guard, however, against making peace with their conscience too easily by handing out a thin coin here and there. That is not enough. Instead, they must direct their efforts to creating a civilization in which men will feel close to one another. They must concern themselves with the underlying and often structural causes that are at the root of international imbalance. Finally, they must provide for personal involvement in combined efforts whereby every person, on every level, may recognize and assume his responsibilities. Every Christian must consider his share in this struggle against misery and injustice not as a marginal activity but as a normal dimension of a fully-lived Christian life, for did not Christ couple an eternal reward to such a concept of Christian living.

Appeal to Nations

Moreover, whole nations must feel themselves responsible for one another in this gigantic struggle against hunger. The moving appeal of Pope Paul VI at Bombay still sounds in our ears:

« ... We entrust to you our special message to the world. Would that the nations could cease the armaments race, and devote their resources and energies instead to fraternal assistance to the developing countries! Would that every nation, thinking « thoughts of peace and not of affliction » and war would contribute even a part of its expenditure for arms to a great world fund for the relief of the many problems of nutrition, clothing, shelter and medical care which afflict so many peoples. »⁴

We touch here on an extremely important point. When we realize that expenditures for military defence in the leading industrial countries will soon equal — yes, even exceed — the sum total of the gross national revenues of all the less developed countries, we cannot help seeing in this situation a violent disorder capable of producing the worst of catastro-

(3) « *Mater et Magistra* », America Press edition, p. 45.

(4) Paul VI at Bombay, December 4, 1964.

phes. Our fellow men ask only to be allowed to live, and despite the fact that the world daily grows richer, they are being increasingly exposed to destruction.

Our prayers and our hopes cry out to God that the nations may progress in the way of mutual aid and cooperation in order to solve what has been described as « one of the most difficult problems facing the modern world — namely, that of the relations between the economically advanced countries and those in the earlier stages of development ».⁵

This cooperation must take place in the name of justice, in a climate of brotherhood and not of paternalism, with openness to a policy of mutual trade, respecting the characteristics of each country and without trespassing on its legitimate autonomy, in a disinterested manner, concerned only for what is best for man, all men, and for the whole man.

Some practical suggestions

We would like to suggest here some practical measures that could well occupy our attention and lead to combined efforts on the part of all Canadians:

1. Public and private agencies should provide all possible information about the needs of the underdeveloped countries, the initiatives that might be undertaken to help them, and the projects already under way.

2. Everyone should strive to enlighten and involve public opinion in this matter. We commend the great work already being done in this area by the communication media: the press, radio and television.

3. Families and schools should strive to educate our youth to a sense of brotherhood and international solidarity. So many occasions are offered to parents and teachers in everyday happenings and circumstances to form young people who genuinely feel that they are members of the great human community.

4. A warm, fraternal welcome should be given to citizens of « the third world » who immigrate into our country to earn their share of the bread that was lacking in their own countries.

5. We must encourage and facilitate the sending abroad of Canadian specialists, technicians, teachers, etc., to lend an able hand to other nations.

6. Governments in our country must realize more and more the supreme importance of our participation in all undertakings to bring help to peoples in need. We are a rich country, blessed by Providence. Can we sincerely say that we are doing our fair share? The suggestion already made, that an international fund be established to fight against hunger in the world, should have a favourable hearing by our political leaders.

7. Participation in the activities of existing international organizations should be especially encouraged. And in this regard, we take occasion here to urge all Catholics to assure the full success of the International Cooperation Year in our country.

Conclusions

If we are to have peace, we must prepare the conditions of peace. One of these conditions is surely the realization of a just international order from which hunger, caused by

(5) « Mater et Magistra », America Press edition, p. 45.

unbalanced distribution of the world's riches, will be banished. The complexity of the problem that we face should not prevent us from making a beginning. Ignorance, laziness and selfishness in this matter take on a special gravity today, and failure to work toward a solution is reprehensible.

« I was hungry and you fed me ; I was naked and you clothed me » (Mt. 25:35) : We recall these words of Christ. If the peoples of the world would simply heed the Gospel and by concerted and intelligent effort take on the responsibility of advancing the economically weak nations, the effect would be electrifying and the world would never again be the same.

While the Christian message bears directly on the kingdom of God, nevertheless, it is essentially (fixed on the welfare of mankind, for at its centre is the commandment of brotherly love. Let every individual and every people who lays claim to the Christian spirit put it into practice and the whole world will stand in admiration.

Mankind faces the greatest opportunity in history to present a spectacle of charity of world dimensions. Will they close their hearts to the anguished cries which rise up all around them ? We beg the Lord that Canadians will hear those cries on this Labour Day and not let them die without an echo.